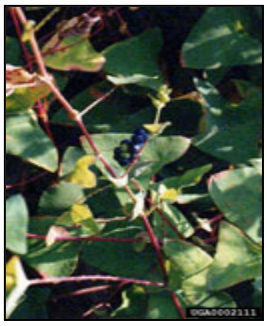
Mile-A Minute Weed

Polygonum perfoliatum L.



Native Origin: India and Eastern Asia

Common Names: Mile-a-minute weed, devil's tail tear thumb

Description: Mile-a-minute weed is an herbaceous, annual, trailing vine in the buckwheat family, Polygonaceae. Reddish stems are armed with downward pointing hooks or barbs. Light green colored leaves are shaped like an equilateral triangle and alternate along the narrow, delicate stems. Distinctive circular, cup-shaped leafy structures, called ocreas, surround the stem at intervals. Flower buds, and later flowers and fruits, emerge from within the ocreas. Flowers are small, white and generally inconspicuous. The fruits are attractive, metallic blue and segmented, each segment containing a single glossy, black or reddish-black seed.

Habitat: Mile-a-minute weed generally colonizes open and disturbed areas, right–of-ways, along the edges of woods, wetlands, stream banks, and roadsides, and uncultivated open fields, resulting from both natural and human causes. It also occurs in environments that are extremely wet with poor soil structure. It will tolerate shade for a part of the day, but needs a good percentage, 63-100% of the available light.

Distribution: Mile-a-minute weed is currently found in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, New York, Virginia, Ohio, Washington, D.C. and other states noted in shaded areas on the map.

Ecological Impact: Mile-a-minute weed grows rapidly, scrambling over shrubs and other vegetation, blocking the foliage of covered plants from available light, and reducing their ability to photosynthesize, which stresses and weakens them. It is a threat to forest regeneration and infests recreational and residential areas

Control and Management:

Mechanical- Hand pulling of seedlings is best done before the recurved barbs on the stem and leaves harden. Removal of vines by hand may be conducted throughout the summer. Repeated mowing or trimming of mile-a-minute plants will prevent the plants from flowering and thus reduce or eliminate fruit and seed production.

Cultural methods- Maintain vegetative community stability and avoid creating gaps or openings in existing vegetation. Maintaining broad vegetative buffers along streams and forest edges will help to shade out, reduce the dispersal of fruits by water and prevent establishment.

Chemical- Glyphosate (e.g., Roundup for upland areas and Rodeo for wetland applications), applied at a low rate will probably be effective in killing mile-a-minute weed with prior approval of the State Department of Agriculture where the application will take place.

Biological Control- USDA Forest Health Technology Enterprise Team conducted research studies in the US and China to determine the feasibility of using natural enemies to control mile-a-minute weed. Studies can be viewed at: www.invasive.org/eastern/biocontrol/26MileAMinute.html

References: www.invasive.org, www.nps.gov